

**Mount Vernon
Public Meeting
Minutes**

March 8, 2003
Skagit Valley College
9:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Commission Members Present: Leo Gaeta, Becky Diaz, Edward Davila, Alice Castilleja-Lara, Yvonne Lopez-Morton, Gabriel Banfi

Commission Members Absent: Diana Avalos (excused) Mario Reyes (excused)

Staff present: Antonio Ginatta and Vita Echeverria

Approval of minutes

Commissioner Diaz motioned to approve minutes. Commissioner Gaeta seconded the motion.

Executive Director report

Spoke about legislative issues and encouraged the community to contact their legislators regarding the bills that are being introduced. Mentioned some bills that were currently being introduced: SB 5081/SB 5430 - Legal presence for driver's license; SB 5696 - Concerning sheepherder housing; and SB 5890 - Pilot program on blood monitoring for farmworkers,

Mentioned the budget cut proposal and how that is going to affect administrative office resources.

Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Alice Castilleja-Lara

Attended an OSA managers meeting and took students to the LEAP conference. Working with the city of Yakima to hire a police chief. She stated that in Yakima they continue to have public parent community meetings so they can have community input.

Commissioner Becky Diaz

The community held a reception for a Peruvian artist. The funds raised were mainly for his healthcare needs. She has been apart of the computer wizards project at Sterling Meadows Apartments. Currently working with local MECHA students in organizing the low-rider event they will be having.

Commissioner Ed Davila

Working with the Highline School District on a Latino site council and working as Chair of the Housing committee of Grupo Mexico. Thanked the community for Commissioner Diaz's work and also acknowledged her husband Ernie.

Commissioner Leo Gaeta

Was contacted by local community members in the Mattawa community about licensed childcare providers and why the Latino providers were the only ones investigated. The licensed daycare providers are afraid of what may happen this year. He told the community to organize and bring the

issues to DSHS. Attended the Housing conference through Grupo Mexico. Contacted Rep. Cox regarding the tuition waiver bill. He has been working on the housing issues in Mattawa. He was very glad to visit the Sterling Meadows Apartments complex in Bellingham and praised the project. He is also helping to organize a Latino Health Fair in Yakima on Sept. 23 & 24. A group of 20 parents have united to do fundraising so they can provide a \$1,000 scholarship for a student in their area.

Commissioner Gabriel Banfi

In the Seattle Metropolitan area the main issue he deals with is racial profiling. He is on the Commission's personnel committee and helps with the recruitment of commissioners. He is also a part of the Eastside Latino Leadership Forum and on March 11th they will celebrate their one-year anniversary

Commissioner Yvonne Lopez-Morton.

The sheepherder bill is important to her because her father was a sheepherder. In Spokane they have about 12,000 Latinos in the county and about 6,000 in the city. She wears many hats in her community and her main focus is to bring diversity to her area. Spoke about the Hispanic Business Professionals Association's jobs hotline and wants to provide Hispanics in community the resources they need. She is also working on trying to get a Hispanic Resource center in Spokane.

Commissioner Lopez-Morton is also meeting with the Latino student groups at the colleges. Spokane was the host of the Racial Profiling conference this year. People and law enforcement need to be taught how to work together for the future of the community.

The HBPA will be awarding scholarships at the Hispanic graduation ceremony they will be hosting. In the past they have given away \$30,000.00.

Unfinished Business/New Business

Commissioner Gaeta - Explained the recruitment process for this area.

Commissioner Banfi - Said the commission would like to have a variety of professionals that serve on the CHA.

Community member asked if an applicant had to have legal status.

Commissioner Banfi - Said that the commission would research that info.

Executive Director - Mentioned that the commissioner positions were volunteer positions, but that there likely might be some background check involved with the application process.

Commissioner Banfi - Made motion to approve the meeting dates for 2003 – 2004. Commissioner Diaz seconded the motion. Motion approved unanimously.

- Commissioner Gaeta – Spoke about the Legislative reception event and the costs associated it. Also discussed the list of priorities to be forwarded to the Governor's office: racial profiling, health care, education, and housing.

Commissioner Banfi made a motion to forward three names to the governor's office. Commissioner Lopez-Morton seconded the motion. Motion approved unanimously.

Commissioner Castilleja-Lara asked the commission to review & comment on the document from METT (Multi Ethnic Think Tank) regarding youth education and drop out rates. She would like to receive the comments from the commission by April 6th.

Commissioner Gaeta appointed Commissioners Castilleja-Lara, Avalos, and Davila to a sub-committee to work on the comments and get them ready for the next meeting.

Commissioner Diaz made a motion for the METT subcommittee to be formed. Commissioner Davila seconded the motion. Motion approved unanimously.

A community member suggested that each commissioner that will be completing a term host a meeting or session in their region to give an orientation about applying for the commission. Commissioners agreed that this was a good idea.

Guest Speakers

Steve Sakuma - Sakuma Farms

Mr. Sakuma's biggest challenge is dealing with racial profiling because of his background and Japanese heritage. His farm has gone from 2nd generation to 3rd. His goal is to have a farm for the long term because he wants to continue through his family generations. He brought two of his workers today to the meeting and mentioned a few words about their lives. He said that they know that they are here to live the American Dream. Education is very important to their farm and will put some of his workers through college. He added that as a community they all have to work together to make it a better community for everyone.

A community member asked Mr. Sakuma what his views are of farmworker unions. He replied that he doesn't have anything against them, but that what he's seen is that farmworker unions seems to take money from the workers and don't always help the workers. He's never had a union involved with his farm nor does he think he ever will. If the worker gets something out of a union then it may be a good union. If not, then maybe they are not doing their job.

Mack Armstrong - Superintendent

Superintendent Armstrong wanted to give perspectives of the students in K-12. Schools are being forced to do more with less. He has learned about the Latino community in as short period of time. He stated that an opportunity to learn is also the same an opportunity for growth. Many Anglo/whites in the community are taking things for granted, because he notices that Hispanic students are making tremendous efforts and are outperforming the other students. Drop out rate is being looked as a "push out" rate. Post-secondary education should be available to all students. We need to work on getting students into groups or commissions, and students connecting with city government. Superintendent Armstrong stated that he saw a potential for disconnect for the district's students and gave examples. What does it take for Mt. Vernon teachers to connect with students? How can we remove the feeling of threat if the families are afraid to fill out government forms? The school district has identified 30 teacher's assistants that will be trained as bilingual teachers.

Consuelo Guandique – Farmworker Investment program

The only office on this side of the state, their agency trains farmworkers and to help remove barriers. Working on trying to get farmworkers to receive better wages. Funded by U.S. Dept. of Labor they need the support at the federal level to continue the program. The lack of education is what keeps them at minimum wage Announced the March started with 50 people now it's about 300-500 the MECHA students take part in this event.

Kerry Ivey & Jose Rodriguez – Labor and Industries

Ms. Ivey is the Regional Administrator in region one for Labor and Industries. Both came today to get to know the community for L&I. and to let them know that they want to make sure employees and employers are safe. They believe workers should get equitable pay and be able to work safely. They want them to also know that there are services available for those that need them. They are working on changing the Report of Accident form to include a language preference section. They are in the process of hiring and training ten bilingual claims managers and working on getting all document translated. They make it clear to the public that nowhere on their system do they ask for immigration status.

Angelica Guillen Hernandez- Skagit Valley College

Ms. Guillen Hernandez stated that she is here to talk about art and announced that they brought an art gallery to the Commission meeting for the day. Spoke about the importance and values of art in their community, and that it documents our life here in the region. Asked the Commission to work with governor to support and promote art. She said it's one of the ways to show their visibility. Announce that the MECHA students are going to be holding a dance for a fundraiser.

Public Comments

Cristobal Sanchez – Western WA University

2nd year student at Skagit spoke about what Latino students have been doing at WWU. They support fair trade apples boycott and they are supporting HB1079 because their main focus is education. ASTA student tutors to go to Sterling Meadows Apartments to teach computer skills. They announced a low-rider show at WWU May 18th. They organized with the student center for an anti-war rally. Latino students also put on a farmworker drive where they collected books and clothing to give back to the community. Mentioned the Migrant Education Conference from May 1st- 3rd at Western WA University.

Navaro Tercero

Made a suggestion or proposal to as the commission that for next year to have an Economic Development portion to the CHA legislative agenda.

Rogelio Benito

Latinos need to work more together because he has seen many injustices and people need educational assistance. He said they now have a lot more potential in the community. Proud of the MECHA students on what they are doing. Spoke about the interaction between the Hispanic community and the rest of the mainstream community.

Edgar - MECHA Student @ Skagit Valley

These are some highlight on what they have been working on:

They held a session so that student could ask questions about HB1079

Establishing workshops los Zapatitas

United farmworkers of America

Jente de sol tentative set for August

Create awareness

Fundraising funds go back into the community by getting the scholarships to students

Faces are constantly being ignored in schools. Feels that the curriculums do not include courses that are of value to the Latino students. Mentioned tuition rates are going up 18%.

Leo mentioned HB1763, which provides conditional scholarships for perspective teachers. He suggested that the community call their local representative.

Ricardo Vayaga

We need to tell the parents to find out how to keep the funds that may be taken away from them. He wants to speak about education, specifically communication with teachers and superintendents to give their children a better education. Invited the public to attend an education conference on May 17th. Thanked the students for all of their hard work. When he served on the Parent Advisory Council he noticed that many parents would not attend the meetings. Reminded us that no children should be left behind but also no parents left behind either.

Antonio Sosa

Mr. Sosa is a Chemical Dependency Counselor who has been helping students and youth to teach them about a healthy life. The most difficult thing for him is when he comes across youth that are undocumented. We need bilingual lawyers that can represent the Hispanics in this area.

Consuelo Guandique

Spoke about dropout rates would like to see statistics and what is being done to track them. Mr. Armstrong responded that we should all hold each other accountable for our work with students.

Pedro Perez

In 1974 he was a MECHA student in high school and back then he faced the same issues the community faces today. Back then they didn't have the superintendent available at meetings so urged people to take advantage of that.

Becky announced \$100 donations to the WHO from Commissioner Banfi.

A plaque was presented to Commissioner Diaz in recognition of her work with the Hispanic community.

Meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.

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1. Exiting commissioners will schedule a local meeting to discuss the application process for the CHA.